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## PETER'S LIFE AND HIS FIRST EPISTLE.

Doctrine is only valuable as it is enforced by life, because life is doctrine's own best interpreter. Teaching becomes truly of interest only as it is seen reflected in a life. Biographers tell us that we can know a man through his letters; yet his letters must be read in the light of his life. Each is made plain by the light that the other reflects.

When we study Peter's First Epistle (whatever may be our conclusion about the Second) we must be struck with the clear imprint of known facts and characteristics of the Apostle's life, upon the style and character of the Epistle. At some points, as we read, we are constrained to stop and say, How like the Galilean Simon! at other points, How the leaven of Jesus has done its work! For the contrasts are as marked as the coincidences. Let us look at Peter's First Epistle, with reference to what we know of his life. There is here, of course, ample room for fancy, yet we believe that by such a survey the Epistle, both in its thought and in its expression, must stand out for us in a renewed freshness and a clearer light.

I. *Peter the Old.* If the Epistle be examined to find the Peter that was born, the native "rock" as hewn from the quarry, we shall find him. Christianity does not change the content of man's personality, but rather the intent of his life. Peter's strong personality, which could not but impress itself on all he might do or say, is clearly marked in the Epistle. It presents a conciseness and force of style which well comport with the nature of the man. Its tone is that of a practical, zealous spirit. There is a blunt force in the style that shows a strong, rugged character behind it. The Gospels show Peter to have been an impulsive man. He could not but make his feelings known; nor did he hesitate in doing so. Few epistles that have come down to us show more real feeling than this one. Peter was a man that could

love *deeply* one whom he loved—he was an affectionate man.\* His dislikes, also, might be quite as marked. The question: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?” shows the nature of some of Peter’s struggles. At the time when he said, “Lord, *with thee* I am ready to go to prison and to death,” he really meant it; the words were an enthusiastic outburst of an affectionate nature—one ruggedly tender. His bitter weeping over the denial; his cold plunge in the lake that chilly morning to salute his Lord, show the fervor and tenderness of his heart. We see the same traits plainly in the Epistle. It breathes tenderness and affection. Such expressions as “Beloved,” “dearly beloved, I beseech you,” “Salute one another with a kiss of love,” and his kindly exhortations to affectionate relations between husband and wife, master and servant, are marked features of the Epistle. It is true, there is a difference between John’s way of breathing love in his first Epistle and Peter’s way of doing so. John’s is that of a man who might not find it hard to love everybody. Peter could love some ardently, but had *learned* to love everybody. John shows in his Epistle a heart that was lovingly tender, as if through a natural maturity; Peter, a heart that by hard blows had been bruised to tenderness. Peter enjoins “loving one another as brethren,” and being “fervent in your love of one another.” John puts it, “Little children, love one another.” We can *feel* the difference.

Peter’s boldness of former days takes, in the Epistle, the form of a courageous rebuke of carnality, and of firm exhortation that the brethren live no longer in fleshly lust.

Peter had a sanguine temperament; and we are not surprised to find the Epistle full of Hope, and of rejoicing, even in affliction. (cf. 1: 3; 1: 8; 1: 13; 1: 21; 2: 7; 3: 16; 4: 13; 5: 4).

II. *Peter the New.* We find in this Epistle many evidences that the rough rock of former days had become

\* His active discipleship did not cause him to forget his wife’s mother, who, it would seem, was tenderly cared for under his own roof at Capernaum (Matt. 8: 14); nor in his busy apostleship to the Dispersed was he neglectful of his wife, who seems to have accompanied him regularly in his missionary journeyings (1 Cor. 9: 5).

polished by Christian experience and the attrition of suffering for Christ's sake. There had appeared in his life many of those strange inconsistencies, so often found in one of the same character. . He is a "rock," yet very unsteady; strong, yet very weak; he walks on the sea, yet sinks in it; boldly he draws the sword in the Garden, yet denies Jesus in the Court; and even later we find him strong in the church council at Jerusalem, but weak when he faces strict Judaism at Antioch. The fact is, there are two kinds of weakness—that which comes from a lack of strength, and that which is strength uncontrolled. Peter's weaknesses were mostly of the latter kind. Had he not been so strong, he had not been so weak. In the Epistle, however, we discover the native power in subjection, and a steadier, mellow life.

Bengel calls Peter the "Apostle of growth." His first Epistle frequently points out the importance of further conquests (1: 22; 2: 2; 4: 1-3; 5: 10). Nothing is more striking than his own growth in grace. Patience, for example, had by no means characterized his early life; he was impulsive, hasty in word and action. Yet how the Epistle breathes the spirit of patience—patience in suffering; always calling to mind how Christ suffered and was patient. This patience has its ground in the "living hope" which is the possession of those "begotten again." Peter was not always a possessor of hope. His denial was the result of loss of hope on a Messiah delivered up. Now he not only emphasizes hope, but also the Lord's sufferings. And he is careful to use the word "Christ" in writing of the sufferings. In other connections he uses "Lord," "Jesus," and "Jesus Christ," but as if designing to lay special stress on the fact of a *suffering Messiah*, he uses in these connections simply "Christ." Here had been a weak point with Peter. A suffering Christ had truly been to him a "stone of stumbling." The confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" he had naturally—from his point of view—followed up with the rebuke "Be this [suffering] far from thee, Lord." The reply, "Get thee behind me, Satan" came "like a sword-cut," as one has expressed it—sharper than that Peter gave the High-priest's servant, and far more lasting. In the Epistle he can

not allude too often to the suffering Messiah. He sees in the idea no contradiction now. He who was once to Peter "a stone of stumbling and rock of offense" (2: 8) has become "a living stone, elect, precious." (2: 4).

Peter's bold, impulsive nature carried him at times to the verge of presumption and vainglory. He on one occasion believed more in his own fidelity than in the word of Jesus" (Godet). Later, he discovered the need of meekness and watchfulness. Once he seemed little awed by any presence, however full of divinity. Now, we find him writing such words as "Pass the time of your sojourning in fear" (1: 17); "As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk." (2: 2); "A meek and quiet spirit" (3: 4); "Be humble-minded" (3: 8): "With meekness and fear" (3: 15); "Humble yourselves therefore . . . God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," (5: 5). How well these injunctions reflect the fact that Peter had learned that his fall was due to the haughty spirit that went before.

He had once lacked the power to watch; often he was unguarded and ungirded in his thought and speech. No one found it easier to become spiritually intoxicated. When he made his strange request for the "three tabernacles," the evangelist has to do him the justice of recording that Peter really did not realize what he asked. Yet, how steady, how sober does he appear in the Epistle. "Watch and be sober;" "Gird up the loins of your mind," and like expressions are conspicuous, (1: 13; 4: 8; 5: 8).

These are a few of the contrasts that might be noted on comparing Peter of the Gospels with Peter of the Epistle. The fact is, the grace of God had done as much for Peter as for any one in the early church. Is there any wonder that at the very beginning of his Epistle he should burst into a joyous thanksgiving for God's bestowal of so great a salvation? No one had a better right to speak knowingly of an "abundant mercy" or "trials by fire" or a "purifying of soul" than he.

III. *Some Things Peter had Seen and Heard.* Close examination of the Epistle will reveal a remarkable reflex of the sayings of Christ and the lessons directly taught by him

to Peter. Of course, we should expect the Epistle to be Christian to the core; but the influence of Christ directly on the mould of thought and form of expression is so marked as to make of itself an interesting study. Certain recorded lessons given Peter, and certain episodes in his life, very clearly reveal themselves in the Epistle.

Jesus loved to compare the proper attitude for a disciple to that of one girded ready for service; "Let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning, and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord." (Lk. 12:35). So Peter exhorts: "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end." (1:13). Christ's frequent exhortations to watchfulness find an echo once and again in Peter's words: "Be sober, be vigilant" (5:8); "Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer" (4:7). Alas! how Peter had once failed in this, and notwithstanding the words "Watch and pray," had fallen asleep while his Lord was wrestling in an agony of prayer.

As we have seen, Peter was not naturally a humble man, but he had heard from Christ's own lips such words as these: "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted." He writes, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (5:6). And who can think that when Peter wrote, "All of you *gird*\* yourselves with humility to serve one another" (5:5), he did not have an impression on his soul's retina of that striking object-lesson given him on the evening when Jesus girded himself and began to wash the disciples feet? And notice that Peter adds to his exhortation, "for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." This, too, is interesting when thought of in connection with the words of Peter, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," and the reply, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Here we may also call to mind the words of Jesus: "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles *lord* it over them . . . not so shall it be among you," (Matt. 20:25). In the Epistle Peter forcibly reflects the same when he exhorts elders to exercise oversight "not of constraint . .

\* A. V., here obscures the figure by rendering "be clothed."

. . . neither as *lording* it over the charge allotted" etc. (5: 3).

Peter had seen the day when he stoutly resented the prophecy of his denial and the words of Jesus: "When thou art converted (turned again) stablish the brethren." Why, said he, "With thee I am ready to go to prison and to death." (Lk. 22: 33). And now, in those very things in which he so ingloriously failed, we find him indeed stablishing the brethren. The Epistle's great burden is just here. What could more forcibly look to this end than the encouraging assurance in 5: 10 that Christ himself would "perfect, stablish strengthen [and some MSS. add] settle" the brethren; or than the exhortations, "Be steadfast in the faith," (5: 9), and "Stand fast therein" (5: 12)?

One aim that runs prominently through the Epistle is that of comfort for Christian suffering (1: 7; 2: 9, 12; 3: 13-15, 18; 4: 12-19; 5: 10f). The great tribulations of the elect who were "sojourners of the Dispersion" called for just such thoughts as presented in these passages; and Peter was just the man to present them. Suffering for good and suffering for evil are frequently contrasted in the Epistle, and the sufferings of Christ are always called to mind. These were matters about which no one knew better than the Apostle himself. His eyes had seen the agonies of the Garden and Judgment Hall; he also knew well enough what it meant to suffer for good as well as to suffer for evil. He had often been before councils because he chose to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29), and he knew what it was to suffer bitter agony because of his own pride, faithlessness and denial. He had come to see through the light of his own life that all these trials of faith are "more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be proved by fire" (1: 7). He sees Christ glorified though suffering (1: 11); whence also that the Christian's joy and glory are through suffering (4: 13); and that he, as a witness of Christ's sufferings, shall be a partaker of his glory (5: 1). The words "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake," (Matt. 5: 10), and "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you

falsely for my sake" (Matt. 5: 12), are borne witness to by Peter in 2: 20: "But if when ye do well and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." And the words in 2: 13, "Having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles that . . . they may by your good works which they behold glorify God in the day of visitation," are distinctly derived from the words of Christ, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven."

Let another comparison be made. Jesus said to Peter on one occasion: "Simon, behold Satan asked to have you [plural, the disciples] that he may sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee [singular, Peter] that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" (Lk. 22: 31, 32). Notice how closely does Peter follow this same thought in the words of warning and comfort to his brethren; "Be sober, be watchful, your adversary the Devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour, whom withstand steadfast in your faith, and the God of grace shall strengthen you." Notice the three leading ideas in each passage alike. (1) Satan's earnest attempt to get all that will fall into his hands; (2) faith, the great protection; (3) the necessity of strength and steadfastness.

That occasion on which Peter was restored after his "turning again" was one never to be forgotten. It was in the early morning on the sea of Tiberias. "Tend my sheep" was the great practical lesson for the future that was taught him that chilly morning on the beach. This entire experience impressed itself permanently upon Peter's life. It is not to be wondered at that we find him writing to the elders, "Tend the flock of God" (5: 2), and again exhorting that they be "examples to the flock" (5: 3); nor that he should write that all once "were going astray like sheep" (2: 25); nor that he should call Him "the chief shepherd" (5: 4) who so often spake of himself as "the Shepherd."

It is interesting to compare the name Christ gave to Peter (Matt. 16: 18), with that which Peter, in the Epistle, gives to Christ.



"Thou art *Petros*, and upon this rock I will build my church." Peter does not take to himself, however, the credit of being the foundation stone of the Church; but as if he would outdo the Christ, he calls Him rather "the living *Lithos*" on which the "spiritual house" has been reared. (4: 2ff) Peter is the rough *Petros*; Jesus the more polished *Lithos*, "the head of the corner."

Other passages in the Epistle might be cited which show in an interesting way the influence of Christ's words on the Apostle. Christ was fond of speaking of the disciple as a steward (Matt. 20: 8; Lk. 12: 20; 16: 1ff). Peter exhorts to "ministering . . . as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (4: 10). "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's," finds echo in the words, "Fear God; honor the King" (2: 17) and again in the exhortation, "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's [Christ's] sake." It was the Lord that sent Peter fishing that the coin from the fish's mouth might fulfil the obligations of both to the "ordinance of man." Christ said of the sinful woman that had bathed his feet with her tears when the host had inhospitably neglected the accustomed courtesy, "Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much." (Lk. 11: 47). Peter reflects the thought in the words, "Love covereth a multitude of sins" (4: 8), and strangely enough he adds immediately, "using hospitality one to another."

In conclusion let it be said that notwithstanding the fact that there are found in Peter's writings so many forms of expression that are Christ's, we cannot say with Schwegeler that the Petrine writings lack individuality. They are the teachings of the Christ, not carried through the generalizing process of a Paul, the trained thinker, nor the soul-communing processes of John, the meditator; yet they are those teachings tested and made dear by having passed through a fiery furnace of personal experience. Christ's teachings had burned deep into Peter's soul. Paul might claim to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2: 16), but with Peter the very mould into which Christ's thoughts were poured seem unbroken. Peter had learned the truth of them by burning experience.

Indeed, he belonged to that class of men who cannot walk along without striking every corner. John might be present at the Lord's arrest and not let his sword bring him into trouble; he could be present in the court during the trial and not have a maid to cross his path. But Peter could not. Hard blows led him to find the truth of Christ's teaching. Peter is the inductive Apostle, Paul the deductive, John the intuitional. John thus becomes the Church's beloved mystic, Paul her great theologian, Peter her faithful exhorter; he who knew as few others were able to know, the fiery difficulties and consequent joys of Christian discipleship.